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UNHCR INSPECTION AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The past year has been primarily a period of consolidation for the Inspection and Evaluation Service. Procedures and methods developed in early 1996 were finalized, tested, improved and integrated with oversight work. In another parallel process, the newly established inspection function has gradually gained broad acceptance throughout the Office.
2. Project Delphi, in addition to the expected mainstreaming of the new oversight activities in UNHCR, has given a specific momentum to the consolidation of the Inspection and Evaluation Service activities. A number of initiatives have been responded to by the Service; these have included the development of a strategy for Inspection and Evaluation; the introduction of a new structure for the Service; the strengthening of the monitoring of implementation of inspection and evaluation recommendations; the improvement of the overall evaluation capacity in UNHCR and the establishment of an Oversight Committee in the Office. The development of a Career Management System has been another opportunity for the Inspection and Evaluation Service to reflect upon and formulate comprehensive sets of objectives.
3. In its broadest expression, an internal oversight service will contribute to improvement in the management and implementation of UNHCR operations and activities through an expanded range of coordinated oversight and follow-up mechanisms. Furthermore, it will ensure that in a more decentralized organizational environment featuring increased delegation to the field, commensurably higher levels of accountability are in force. Finally, it will provide the High Commissioner with independent management advice.
4. With the ever-growing concern for effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of humanitarian programmes, the demand for oversight activities is

bound to increase sharply within the short-term. This in turn will translate into rising pressure on the inspection and evaluation capacity of the Office. Despite ambitious objectives, the impact of the work of the Inspection and Evaluation Service will be inevitably proportional to the resources it has available.

II. INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

5. During the past year, inspection missions have continued to be dispatched to various parts of the world including Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Central Europe. Recommendations were formulated and their implementation followed-up in accordance with now established inspection procedures. The Standing Committee was periodically informed of inspection activities through the various updates on regional developments.

6. With more than fifty countries visited since its inception, the Inspection and Evaluation Service has now at its disposal a considerable amount of useful information. One of the major activities of the Service during the last reporting period was to analyse the data collected in order to draw lessons applicable to future programmes. Moreover, information was also analysed to evaluate the impact of the inspection exercises on operations and to adjust procedures and methodologies to various oversight needs.

7. Lessons learnt related to programme and operations management were compiled last spring from finalized inspections reports. In addition to its general monitoring purpose, the exercise provided an input for the ongoing design of the new organization-wide Operations Management System. A number of observations, which have appeared most frequently and which have a broad geographical distribution, indicate areas in need of particular attention.

8. For example, inspection teams often noted that within operational situations, "plans of action" to include short and medium-term objectives and tasks could be more systematically developed. Furthermore, it was felt that in some regions a clearer overall strategy could be designed and formulated.

9. With respect to project and operations management, a number of observations pertaining to improved accountability recurred with some regularity. These include the need to close projects promptly, to effect financial transfers to implementing partners on schedule, to ensure the submission of reports and financial statements by partners, and to ensure adequate maintenance of project accounts and supporting documents and the fulfillment of all audit requirements. Periodic reviews of implementing agencies are another means to improve accountability.

10. In some country operations, as well as in several regional situations, contingency plans would need to be developed or updated. While implementing partners are generally associated with such activities, participatory approaches may at times suffer from the pressure of late planning as well as from rapidly developing situations.

11. More could often be done also with regard to the field offices' knowledge of the operational environment. Socio-demographic data could be widely collected. Generic databases and refugee registration systems to facilitate regional caseload approaches could be developed.

12. Programmes for urban caseloads, which are particularly resource-intensive, could be regularly analysed and changes in options considered in the pursuit of durable solutions. Case management approaches could be systematically tried out.

13. The interaction between the Inspection and Evaluation Service and global projects such as the Operations Management System, Project Delphi and the Career Management System has facilitated the acceptance of the newly established inspection function. Through the contribution of its field review experience to the debates, the Service has found common ground with its operational counterparts in UNHCR's regional bureaux and desks. As a result, inspection reports and recommendations have been considered more thoroughly and follow-up procedures respected.

14. More recently, the Inspection and Evaluation Service also thoroughly reviewed and analysed recommendations pertaining specifically to administrative and human resources management. The review listed recommendations under the separate headings of general administration, staffing, conditions of service and entitlements, staff security, staff medical arrangements and administrative training and upgrading of management capacity. Among the most frequently encountered problems are:

- (i) the need to improve the exchange of information in field offices, including the regular inter-office reporting of staff briefings and meetings;
- (ii) the need to consider the applicability of schemes pertaining to the relief of stress and the relief of isolation (MARS/VARI);
- (iii) issues regarding the classification of duty stations with regard to actual conditions;
- (iv) the inadequacy of remunerations in respect of the actual cost of living at duty stations;
- (v) medical facilities and medical evacuation plans;
- (vi) excessive delays in filling existing posts, and
- (vii) the need for administrative training for staff in field offices.

In future, the Inspection and Evaluation Service will continue to systematically review, categorize and analyse the observations and recommendations produced during every inspection mission. It is hoped that within several years the sum of the Service's observations will thoroughly reflect UNHCR's operational environment.

15. The development of a computerized database, which had already begun during the previous reporting period, and whose capabilities become gradually more apparent to the staff of the Inspection and Evaluation Service, has been in itself a significant catalyst for the analysis of inspection output. In addition, the database gives the inspection function a tool for the development and testing of inspection methodology. Finally, it is expected that the database, when fully operational, will also allow for optimal systematization of the follow-up on inspection recommendations, hence freeing staff resources for work requiring further review and analysis.

16. In the coming year, inspection work will continue systematically covering important operations, as well as lesser ones and situations involving several offices as well as smaller single country offices. Among the proposed inspection locations are the former Yugoslavia, this autumn, and later China and Japan.

III. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

17. During the past year, evaluation activities have been concentrated mainly on thematic evaluations of some of the issues and concerns UNHCR is attempting to address. It appears, however, that organizational and system changes brought about by the Delphi process are leading to a significant expansion in the scope of UNHCR's evaluation function. As a consequence, new systems will place much greater emphasis on self-evaluations carried out at the situation level.

18. Thematic and self-evaluations are complementary approaches, which strengthen the Office's ability to systematically review all activities. Greater emphasis on self-evaluations will permit UNHCR to build evaluations into each operation in a manner that will greatly expand evaluation coverage and improve programme planning. Thematic evaluations will serve a long-established need for UNHCR to undertake comprehensive analysis of key operational activities and management issues. In recent years, senior managers have increasingly called for thematic evaluations to assist them in making major changes, develop new strategies or simply to better understand and analyse innovative operational approaches.

19. Activities approved by the High Commissioner for the second half of 1996 and early 1997 include:

- Review of capacity-building in central and eastern Europe
- Review of UNHCR's refugee education activities
- Staff stress and security : a management challenge for UNHCR
- Review of UNHCR's implementing arrangements
- Review of UNHCR's phase-out strategies
- Refugee camp security in the Great Lakes region

20. After the evaluation is distributed, the Inspection and Evaluation Service monitors progress in implementing recommendations, as well as stimulates and supports the process, as required. To track follow-up more systematically, evaluation staff use a recently introduced computerized database to monitor and report on follow-up actions.

21. An important role of the evaluation function has been to disseminate lessons that can be incorporated into planning, training, and programme design. Hence, close links are maintained with other organizational components, which provide a means of channelling lessons learnt back into activities. Evaluation conclusions have also been disseminated by distributing reports to staff, who are involved in similar activities or issues throughout the organization, thereby enabling them to draw lessons relevant to their work. New systems such as the internal REFworld have continued expanded staff access to evaluation thus further increasing the usefulness and impact of the work.

A. Review of capacity-building in Central and Eastern Europe

22. The evaluation found that after several years of experience in the region, there now seems little doubt that capacity-building activities constitute the most useful and cost-effective means of assisting Governments in the geographically vast and relatively developed area of the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) and Central Europe. Capacity-building also appears to be the best way in which UNHCR can exert significant influence over asylum laws and practices. Thus, capacity-building was judged a legitimate and essential area of work for UNHCR; most countries considered capacity-building to be the activity which should receive the Office's highest priority.

23. The conclusions and recommendations of the report were welcomed by the Regional Bureau for Europe, and immediate action was taken to implement those recommendations relating to the region in the context of the CIS Conference and its follow-up process. In order to increase the organizational attention given to this important area of activity, a special session of UNHCR's Policy Committee is being organized to consider policy questions and issues related to such activities.

B. Staff stress and security

24. Since the beginning of the decade, humanitarian staff have been increasingly exposed to unacceptable levels of violence in the course of their work. The evaluation acknowledged that UNHCR has made considerable progress in the areas of staff security and stress management and noted the significant contribution the agency has made to United Nations system-wide developments on these two fronts. Nevertheless, it also identified many areas in which UNHCR's existing procedures and practices can be further enhanced to better ensure the security of its staff and to mitigate stress levels.

25. The report calls for UNHCR and its partners to undertake an in-depth joint analysis of security thresholds in order to define minimal conditions for service in future humanitarian operations in situations of emerging or ongoing violence. Particular concern is raised in the report over the security of national staff. The report's recommendations received the full support of the Senior Management Committee, which has charged the Division of Human Resources Management with preparing a plan of action incorporating the recommendations.

C. A review of UNHCR refugee education activities

26. The support for education activities in UNHCR is often thought to have suffered during the financial constraints of the early 1990s and its aftermath. The evaluation concluded that three types of education and their related target groups should be given particular priority: primary education for children, basic education and literacy retention for adolescents and adult literacy. Other types of education, while needed and important, were accorded a lower priority in terms of coverage, due to funding constraints.

27. It is anticipated that the new education policy and guidelines suggested by the review will be adopted. Field offices will be requested to assess their current programmes in the light of the new policy and priorities and to revert to the Division of Operational Support with their plans for implementation.

Technical guidance to assist in implementing new approaches will be provided through technical manuals, planning workshops and, where necessary, direct technical assistance.

D. Review of UNHCR's implementing arrangements

28. The quality of service UNHCR provides to its beneficiaries depends largely upon the effectiveness of its implementing partners. The arrangements adopted also have considerable financial implications. The evaluation recommended a more structured and consultative approach to selecting implementing partners that would include actively seeking out implementing alternatives and assessing them against a well-defined set of selective criteria. A number of other measures were also recommended to improve UNHCR's approach to implementing arrangements. These include modified implementing instruments, regular evaluation of implementing arrangements, establishment of an implementing partner database and increased capacity-building with local agencies.

E. Review of UNHCR's phase-out strategies

29. With more responsibilities in post-repatriation and internal displacement situations, systematic early phase-out of UNHCR programmes has become less appropriate. The study makes a number of general recommendations. It stresses the need for careful definition of objectives and adequate planning. It cautions against piecemeal reintegration activities and recommends the use of comprehensive multi-sectoral programmes. Furthermore, it notes that the hand-over of reintegration activities to a single successor agency cannot be seen as realistic. A hand-over has limited chances of success where an integrated approach to post-conflict activities has been lacking.

F. Refugee camp security in the Great Lakes region

30. Violence and generalized insecurity in and around camps jeopardized humanitarian efforts in the Great Lakes region. As a consequence, UNHCR was requested to negotiate with the Governments of the asylum countries for the provision of security forces and the implementation of measures to restore public order in refugee camps and settlement areas. The review notes that UNHCR was compelled to act while having no control over political processes. This situation led to a compromise, which in future should be avoided.

31. Several major reviews, which form the Inspection and Evaluation Service's initial 1997 evaluation work programme, are currently in progress and include the following subjects:

- (i) Adequacy of UNHCR's efforts to protect and assist refugee children and adolescents;
- (ii) UNHCR's direct use of staff employed by agencies;
- (iii) Mass information activities;
- (iv) Land and property issues in repatriation;
- (v) Review of assistance to elderly urban refugees.